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THE GILT-BRONZE TILES OF THE PANTHEON

IN regard to the removal and subsequent fate of the gilt-bronze roofing-tiles of the Pantheon a remarkable series of errors runs through several of the hand-books to the Roman ruins, and a number of more pretentious works of reference. It is true that the matter is of no great consequence, and yet in a case where historical accuracy is readily obtainable, it is strange that the authors, or compilers, of the books in question should have paid this dubious tribute to the accuracy of their predecessors, and spared themselves the trouble of turning up the original authorities. But this has always been the genius of compilation : to verify a few of the leading references, where matters of real importance are concerned, and to accept without question the statements of previous compilers, where nothing of vital consequence seems to be involved.

In the case of the Pantheon tiles, the oft-repeated error is with regard to the time of their removal, and the place to which they were ultimately carried.

Thus Pauly (old edition, 1848, v, p. 1130) : "Im J. 655 liess der griechische Kaiser Constans II. die Ziegel von vergoldetem Erze, womit die Dachung der Wölbung und wahrscheinlich auch der Vorhalle bedeckt war, nach Constantinopel entfernen."¹

O. Seyffert, *Dictionary of Classical Antiquities* (Nettleship-Sandys, 1891), p. 457 : "The gilt-bronze tiles of the roof were taken by the emperor Constans II. to Constantinople in 655 A.D."

¹ Baedeker, *Central Italy*, 1897, p. 199, also follows Pauly, while Hare, *Walks in Rome*, 1874, p. 479, has a correct version of the story.

R. Borrmann, in Baumeister's *Denkmäler*, 1889, ii, col. 1158: "Kaiser Constans schleppte 655 die vergoldeten Bronzeziegel der Kuppel fort."

H. T. Peck, *Dictionary of Classical Literature and Antiquities*, 1897, p. 1169: "The gilt-bronze tiles of the roof were taken by the emperor Constans II. to Constantinople A.D. 655."¹

R. Burn, *Rome and the Campagna*, 1871, p. 331: "In the middle of the seventh century Constans II. took off the gilded bronze tiles of the roof, and was carrying them to Constantinople, with the plunder of the Forum of Trajan, when he was intercepted at Syracuse by the Saracens and killed."

R. Burn, *Old Rome*, 1880, p. 135: the same repeated verbatim, but with the insertion of a false date (650).

J. H. Middleton, *Remains of Ancient Rome*, 1892, ii, p. 133, with evident obligations to Burn: Constans "was carrying them off to Constantinople when he was intercepted and killed by the Saracens at Syracuse, into whose hands these and other rich spoils from Rome fell." The date 663 is correctly given.

J. Dennie, *Rome of Today and Yesterday*, 1894, p. 264: Constans "did not get safe home with his spoils, but fell into the hands of the Saracens in Syracuse." The date (p. 263) is correctly given.²

The source of the statement that the tiles were sent to Constantinople seems to be a chapter in Paulus Diaconus hastily consulted, we may suppose, by the author of the article in the old Pauly, who completely ignored the next chapter but one, which should have served to correct the mistake. After describing in full the coming of Constans to Rome, and his twelve days' visit there, Paulus speaks of the spoils ruthlessly taken, with no respect for sacred places, . . . "in tantum, ut etiam basilicam beatae Mariae, quae aliquando Pantheon vocabatur, . . . et

¹ This in an article which, though published in 1897, still knows nothing of Chedanne and the extraordinary discoveries of 1892.

² Another popular book, *The Eternal City*, by Clara Erskine Clement, 1896, i, p. 249, has it that Constans "was taking them to Constantinople when he was attacked and killed by the Syracusans" — very misleading at best. The date, however, is correctly given.

iam . . . locus erat omnium martyrum, discoöperiret, tegulasque aereas exinde auferret, easque simul cum aliis omnibus ornamentis Constantinopolim transmitteret" (*De Gest. Langob.* v, 11; Migne, *P. L.* 95, 602). If we read on, however, we come to the story of the assassination of Constans at Syracuse, and the subsequent descent of the Saracens upon that unhappy city. The Saracens then (chap. 13) "Auferentes quoque praedam nimiam, et omne illud quod Constans Augustus a Roma abstulerat ornatum in aere et diversis speciebus, sicque Alexandriam reversi sunt." If Constans, therefore, had any intention of sending the spoils ultimately to Constantinople, it was defeated by his death and the subsequent raid of the Saracens. But it may well be doubted whether he had any such intention, after establishing himself at Syracuse, inasmuch as he does not appear to have meditated returning to Constantinople himself.¹ The historians emphasize the fact that he left his capital with the settled purpose of making Rome again the seat of power.² Balked in this plan, the originality of which is striking in a Byzantine emperor, he decided to leave Italy to the Lombard. Syracuse became his new capital, and so remained until his assassination, five years later. Thus the spoils of Rome remained at Syracuse only to fall a prey to the Saracens, soon after Constans's death, and to be carried by them to Alexandria.

If the narrative of Paulus by its careless expression "Constantinopolim transmitteret" — corrected, however, only a little further on — might lead the hasty reader into a trap, it is more

¹ Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire*, ii, p. 301, thinks Constans may have "intended to return to his eastern residence at some future time," and sees an intimation of this in the spoiling of Rome. But this is an inference, the worth of which will vary with the weight assigned to Constans's purpose to remove the seat of empire to the west. It is easy to see why neither Paulus nor Anastasius could imagine anything else than an intended return to Constantinople.

² *E.g.* Theophanes, ed. Bonn. i, p. 532: *βουληθεὶς ἐν Ῥώμῃ τὴν βασιλείαν μεταστήσαι*; cf. *ib.* p. 538; Cedren, ed. Bonn. p. 762: *βουλόμενος ἐν Ῥώμῃ τὴν βασιλείαν μεταστήσαι*; Paul. Diac., *Hist. Miscella*, 19 (Migne, *P. L.* 95, 1053): "voluit in urbem Romam imperium transferre."

difficult to misunderstand the account of the same events given by the papal librarian, Anastasius, in the *Liber Pontificalis*, § 136 (Migne, *P. L.* 128, 777). To quote only what is most essential — “sed et ecclesiam beatae Mariae ad Martyres, quae de tegulis aereis erat coöperta, discoöperiret, et in regiam urbem cum aliis diversis quae deposuerat, direxit.” Again, § 137, p. 791: “Postmodum [*i.e.* after the death of both Constans and the usurper Mizizius] venientes Saraceni in Siciliam, obtinuerunt praedictam civitatem. . . . Similiter et praedam nimiam fecerunt, et aes quod ibidem a civitate Romana delatum fuerat, secum tollentes, Alexandriam reversi sunt.”

It was to Alexandria, therefore, that the precious roofing of the Pantheon was taken, and not to Constantinople.

The confusing date, 655 A.D., is evidently according to the *Alexandrian* chronology, which differs from the common reckoning by seven or eight years, according to the season of the year. Paulus Diaconus (*De Gest. Langob.* v, 11) says that Constans remained in Sicily from the seventh indiction to the twelfth. Converting this by Clinton's tables into years of our era, we have 663 and 668.¹ And these are the dates to be found in the recent histories, Hodgkin,² Bury,³ Gregorovius,⁴ etc. For 655 in the various citations above we should therefore substitute 663.

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¹ Clinton gives 668 as the year of Constans's death; *Epitome of the Chron. of Rome and Constantinople*, p. 265.

² Vol. vi, pp. 277 ff.

³ *Op. cit.* ii, pp. 301 ff., 310.

⁴ *Rome in the Middle Ages*, Eng. Tr., ii, pp. 153 ff., 160, 162; cp. also Finlay, *Greece under the Romans*, i, pp. 379-80.